

*Pentecostals and Evangelicals
in Venezuela: Consolidating
Gains, Moving in
New Directions*

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Whereas the Catholic bishops have only recently proclaimed themselves committed to a "new evangelization" of the continent, the evangelical churches of the region have been conducting enormously successful evangelization programs for decades. Throughout the past twenty years, evangelical churches and members have been increasing rapidly, and their rates of increase show no sign of slowing. Data collected between 1967 and 1980 in Venezuela suggest that adherents of the evangelical movement in that country increased from some 47,000 to 500,000 members over that thirteen-year period.¹ Although no data are available, the evangelical community is believed to have grown even faster since the 1980s. By far the fastest-growing portion of the evangelical community is converts to Pentecostal churches. The notably increased social presence of the evangelical movement in Venezuela may be gauged by the increasing role of evangelicals in politics and the increasingly bold plans and projections produced by local evangelical umbrella organizations.² Venezuelan evangelical churches grew out of British and North American mission efforts dating back to the end of the nineteenth century, but the great majority of churches are now completely independent of the original missions and fully national in terms of their financial and personal resources.³ They act independently within the local religious context and shape their future in terms of the constraints and possibilities of their local cultural and social backgrounds.

Ultimately, the best way to understand the potential prospects and pitfalls of the so-called new evangelization or to explain the success of the evangelical movement and the emergence of Pentecostalism without recourse to polemics is

through a historical analysis. Such work must take into account the specific constraints and unique developments experienced as this religious movement took root in Venezuela and throughout Latin America. In the presentation that follows, I will place the origins of Pentecostalism in Venezuela in the wider context of the evangelical movement in general. Correspondingly, I will refer to Pentecostalism and its distinctive experience when the available data permit me to distinguish Pentecostal from non-Pentecostal evangelicals. Much of the time, the experience of Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal evangelicals in Venezuela is too entangled to permit fine distinctions. The central goal of this chapter is a comparative evaluation of the unique reality of Pentecostalism in contemporary Venezuela. To do that, however, this analysis must start and end with the wider experience of evangelical growth and development in general.

The Development of the Evangelical Community

Evangelical penetration began in earnest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the continent, when U.S.-based evangelical organizations were ready to replace the British as the leading evangelical entrepreneurs. The once predominantly English-staffed and English-funded *sociedades biblicas* (biblical societies) and groups of Bible hawkers became increasingly North American in staff and funding at this time. Mission groups expanded from a mere presence into a substantial enterprise. These evangelical efforts were funded, staffed, and promoted through the appeal to Northern European and North American imaginations of a not too culturally or geographically distant area dominated by a Spanish Catholic tradition that was considered both religiously wrong and socially backward.⁴

During the beginnings of the North American Protestant missionary enterprise in Latin America in the late nineteenth century, two key U.S. denominations involved in missionary work came to an agreement designed to avoid duplicating work and prevent sheep stealing. The Methodists agreed to concentrate efforts on the Southern Cone and Brazil and the Presbyterians on the more northern portions of South America. As a result, the first permanent North American missionary church set up in Caracas was Presbyterian. The first permanent native congregation, El Redentor (The Redeemer), was established by Dr. Theodore Pond in 1900, some three years after his arrival in Caracas.

Following the evangelical strategy pursued by mainline denominations throughout Latin America, El Redentor sponsored the Colegio Americano (American School), and that school came to consume most of the energy and resources of the local Presbyterian community.⁵ As its name implies, its purpose was to introduce young Venezuelans to North American culture, including its language and science as well as values and religious beliefs. Both church and school continue to this day, although the Presbyterians have long been among the slowest-growing of all denominations in Venezuela. Their relatively more elitist and

educated tradition, perhaps, made them regarded as among the more liberal and least "evangelical" of the churches in Caracas. This image persists in spite of the fact that they took a strongly conservative, charismatic turn some decades ago.⁶ The high amounts of energy consumed by their school further explain such slow growth.

In the early twentieth century, distinct North American missionary efforts associated with the Scandinavian free-church tradition played an important role in the history of the expansion of evangelical churches. These efforts are today the basis of several important church organizations of non-Pentecostal evangelicals. By the early 1950s, the Baptists had also established themselves as an independent national convention. The Assemblies of God became incorporated as a national denomination soon after. The former is now the most widespread non-Pentecostal evangelical in Venezuela; the latter is the most potent Pentecostal denomination.

Often termed "ecumenical" Protestants because of their relative openness to collaboration with Catholics, the British Anglicans and the German Lutherans have never had a perceptible impact outside of their communities. Both, however, have been present since the early nineteenth century. They have never really undertaken serious efforts to promote conversions and instead have focused on nurturing their ethnically based religious communities. This situation became somewhat more complicated for the Lutherans when U.S.-based Lutherans of the Missouri Synod arrived in the late 1940s. These newly arrived Lutheran pastors had no particular allegiance to the Venezuelan German Lutherans but needed a base with which to begin their work. They first tried to work with the Venezuelan German ethnic community, which had lost its regular supply of German-trained pastors during World War II. Once German pastors again began arriving regularly after the war, the missionaries of the Missouri Synod turned to their school and radio work. Although they have had enormous, ongoing investments of U.S. personnel and financial resources, they have grown very little. Their evangelical strategy has been characterized by high visibility, ample funding, and well-trained personnel. However, they have never really targeted a local clientele or developed local leadership. Their work has been overly centralized and dominated by a wellfunded, well-staffed organization of foreigners. This approach has not sufficiently allowed for local initiative, and the Lutherans have had no more success than the Presbyterians.

Members of the Plymouth Brethren arrived relatively early in the nineteenth century with the intention to win converts. The first member to arrive in the country was a Spaniard working with a railway construction company. Other members followed, sent by individual congregations rather than a centrally funded and coordinated mission board. The very simple ritual, basic organizational structure, fierce, millennial emphasis on the Bible, and humble manner won this group a loyal following, particularly in the central and western portion of the country.⁷ Although their congregations were usually small, they multiplied

rapidly. By the 1970s they had more congregations than any other evangelical group in Venezuela.

Although they share with the Plymouth Brethren a fundamentalist, dispensationalist theology with millennial overtones, Pentecostals have a religious style enormously different from the Brethren's quiet, almost Quaker-like style. Noisy, revivalist organizers, they have historically scandalized many members of the more traditional evangelical churches, but leaders within both traditions commonly insist on their mutual recognition as fellow evangelicals.

Pentecostals and the Venezuelan Evangelical Experience

Organized religion in any form is weak in Venezuela, particularly among the popular classes. Since dramatic reversals in its status during the nineteenth century, Catholicism has had to build alliances with social groups that could shield it from hostile forces and allow it to rebuild. Institutional investment in the emerging urban-based professional and managerial classes and other middle sectors was particularly concentrated in the field of education. As a result of this development, the presence of the Catholic church among the popular classes declined relative to other social groups throughout much of the twentieth century. Although the number of persons per parish rose significantly, middle-class access to Catholic institutions and religious personnel actually increased as private Catholic schools run by religious orders dramatically expanded.

In many ways, the evangelicals of Venezuela and of contemporary Latin America in general may be classified among the Calvinist or radical streams of reformed Christianity. However, evangelicals in Venezuela no less than the rest of Latin America today generally share a crucial dimension relatively foreign to the historic, Reformation-descended churches. Most show some degree of influence by the North American Pentecostal movement, whether officially Pentecostal or not. Many churches were planted in the region by North American revivalists from mainline denominations on "faith missions." These preachers often had a certain enthusiasm and experience of the spirit that led them to preach and promote kinds of religious experience different from that more typical of their sponsoring denominations.⁸ Many of the individual churches or church organizations founded by these persons and their native associates eventually split from foreign mother churches or sponsoring denominations precisely because their latent Pentecostal-like practices and beliefs were opposed by the parent churches.⁹ Some faith missions have been strongly linked to particular denominations, but many others have been the results of free-lancing efforts of independent congregations in North America or elsewhere.¹⁰ In any case, the revivalist, charismatic orientation of the faith missions and other missionary efforts accounts in part for the strongly Pentecostal content of Venezuelan evangelical religion. The revivalist spirit and theology conveyed by many of the North American missions easily combined with local popular culture, which gives a central role to the supernatural and the miraculous in everyday life.¹¹

For all their Bible-smuggling, street-corner preaching, and bold missionary work throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, evangelicals hardly increased until they became open to Pentecostal religious meanings and practice. Although this shift was well under way by the 1930s, it increased dramatically during the 1950s and 1960s. Before the predominance of Pentecostalism, movements could be built and organizations established, but a broad culturally based appeal to potential members simply did not exist.

The relative shift to Pentecostalism was due to both external and internal factors. Externally, the mission agencies that had supported the evangelical movement were changing. By the 1960s, above all after the Second Vatican Council, it seemed as if the Catholic church had reformed itself on many of the issues that had brought Protestant churches in North America and Western Europe to support missionary work in Latin America in the first place. Bible reading was now encouraged by Catholic leaders. Ecumenism was strong internationally. In Latin America the ecumenical movement was producing many collaborative Bibles and Bible-based publications produced jointly by the *sociedades biblicas* and the Catholic bishops' conferences. The central offices of major Protestant religious bodies were losing interest in focusing on differences with Catholicism and were becoming suspicious of traditional "missionary" work in a multicultural world. In short, the commitment of traditional, mainstream Protestantism to fund and staff missionary work declined rapidly.

As Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and the other mainline denominations that made up the World Council of Churches lost interest in earlier missionary efforts, North American fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches were gaining the strength, capacity, and interest necessary to create increasingly strong networks of churches, publishing houses, Bible institutes, and umbrella organizations. Most of these churches were opposed to ecumenical collaboration with churches outside the evangelical tradition and unaffiliated with the World Council of Churches. The new missionary spurt, which began in earnest after World War II and came into its own during the 1970s, is now being carried forward by a variety of groups other than the traditional mainstream denominations, including independent faith missions, the mission agencies of such Pentecostal powerhouses as the Assemblies of God, and a variety of evangelical parachurch organizations. Denominational ties are no longer a vital feature. Instead, a commitment to fundamentalist beliefs in the Bible and an enthusiastically millennialist interpretation of the Great Commission¹² have become the glue that binds this new wave of evangelization together.¹³

In spite of their importance in transferring ideas and practices, foreign missionaries and missionary resources have never been the key to increased membership in grass-roots religious organizations. The appeal that grass-roots religious organizations hold for the potential member ultimately stems from the degree to which the meanings and structures they offer make sense in terms of everyday life and cultural patterns. At this level, social factors behind the Pentecostal orientation of Venezuelan evangelicals take on their full importance.

During the past generation, Venezuela has undergone a period of dizzyingly rapid urbanization.¹⁴ As the city became the defining feature of social life, rural cultural values and religious traditions were transferred. The immense, newly urbanized but resource-scarce population found itself in marginal urban areas where the Catholic church was simply unable to deliver religious services in any appreciable way. Although self-identified as Catholics, the urbanizing former peasants had typically been even less exposed to institutional Catholicism than their urban counterparts.¹⁵ Their religious worldview was relatively detached from orthodox understandings of practice and belief yet infused with Christian symbolism derived from popular Catholicism.

There was a folk Catholicism, open to the interventions of spirits and saints and demons in their lives. Such notions found little room in the modernizing Catholic beliefs and practices offered by priests and nuns during the post-Vatican II era. In many cases, the official institutional church of bishops and priests began to curtail and reshape popular, traditional religious celebrations in favor of more "purified" and rationalist approaches.

At the same time that modernizing Catholicism appeared to be fighting a small-scale holy war against folk Catholicism and its beliefs in interventionist spirits, saints, and demons, nature religions and Pentecostal Christianity were expanding dramatically. Nature religions, often based on native or African animist beliefs and practices, had begun for the first time to organize beyond the folk level, utilizing the wide networks that urban life permits.¹⁶ For its part, Pentecostal religion found that it had plenty of maneuvering room in the social context of an expanding urban frontier full of potential clients with strong affinities for Pentecostal Christianity.

The Pentecostal belief in the fundamental role of the Holy Spirit in everyday life and the worship experience and a concrete willingness to "cast out demons in the name of the Lord" have proved to be strong assets in the propagation of the evangelical movement. Pentecostals, elites, and ordinary members alike, have no question that spirits can heal and harm. The issue is to discern and render the demon spirits harmless through the superior power of the Holy Spirit. Rather than struggling to reshape popular culture in the direction of indigenous liberationist movements or rejecting popular culture in favor of rational, modern orthodoxy, Pentecostals easily fit their beliefs and practices into the complex array of popular religious beliefs and practices.¹⁷ Both Pentecostal religion and popular religious tradition assume supernatural, spiritual intervention in everyday life. Also, they both have an individualist religious orientation toward immediate gratification and claim to solve the pressing problems of everyday life, such as disease.¹⁸

The preferred evangelical "market" and source of most new recruits is among the poor.¹⁹ This observation is nothing new; many of the preachers and missionaries themselves noted this relationship at an early date. Haymaker, a prominent evangelical missionary early in the century, pointed out that it was the lower

classes who had nothing to lose who were the most likely to join. Significant, family-like ties among members no less than ties to the Spirit, as Birdwell-Pheasant shows in a study of Pentecostalism in Belize, can be a dramatically important feature of Pentecostal life and one especially favored by people from within the popular classes.²⁰ A researcher of Protestant growth in Colombia during the 1960s noted that Pentecostalism has a strong elective affinity with its targeted population. Its structures rapidly adapt to local conditions, and it tends to grow most successfully among the marginalized. As noted elsewhere, the insistence on immediate gratification of spiritual and personal needs through the powerful intervention of the Spirit and fellow believers is important to people in a vulnerable position and from a cultural background steeped in popular Catholicism.²¹

The particular form that Pentecostalism has taken is not so much a rejection of traditional religiosity as a systematization of it. Certainly, Pentecostal beliefs and practices are intelligible to popular religious thinking that emphasizes spiritual intervention in the problems of the present both as causes and solutions. Pentecostal churches emphasize the devil in their preaching and highlight the power of the Holy Spirit to save one from evil spirits and cure both physical and spiritual ailments. The personal encounter with Jesus so central to the evangelicals is often understood as a kind of spiritual possession by the Holy Spirit. Holy water is an important ingredient in Latin American popular Catholicism, often being used for informal, unorthodox home healing rituals or on other occasions of pressing need for supernatural intervention. Among Latin American Pentecostals, such ritual is not eliminated outright; instead, water is replaced with an oil of anointing that is considered even more efficacious and is justified by Scripture. Such oil is commonly used in healing ceremonies when praying for the sick or exorcising demons from the disturbed. Often even terminology and patterns of deference related to religious ritual may be carried over from popular Catholicism to Pentecostal religious life. Not uncommonly, the pulpit may be referred to as an altar and considered a sacred space through which only the most worthy – pastors and their closest associates – may pass.

In short, evangelical Christianity has been transformed from small groups of pious Bible readers to dynamically expanding communities fired by an urgent Pentecostal reading of the Bible and interaction with popular religious culture in the new, expanding settlements of the urban poor.²² Today, building on fundamental, deeply rooted cultural conceptions of the sacred and the spiritual within a biblical framework, the evangelicals—above all the popular, Pentecostal variety—have changed within a generation from an unnoticed portion of the population to rising stars.²³

Pentecostalism, Venezuelan-Style

Almost since they emerged as a distinct religious tradition within evangelical Protestantism, there has been a strong linkage between Pentecostals and the "elec-

tronic church" of the mass audience. More than other religious organizations, they are adept at the technological tools of the mass media and such techniques as the mass-crusade evangelization campaign style, which provide invaluable opportunities for mobilization and recruitment.²⁴ Their message and methods quickly became shaped to fit their target clientele, but control remains local and remarkably adaptable to different social and cultural contexts.

A longtime Pentecostal church organization in Venezuela was a product of one of the first mass ministries to employ new communications technologies. Aimee Semple McPherson's Foursquare Gospel Church (Iglesia Cuadrangular) continues to flourish in the western part of the country, where it was first established over forty years ago. Like these churches, most Pentecostal churches are the result of personal, independent efforts of church sponsorship rather than centralized denominational planning for growth and evangelization. This is true whether the church is itself independent or part of an extensive network of churches. The loose network quality of church organizations and the personal ties on which they are based tend to encourage rapid expansion as well as the development of splinter groups.

The Assemblies of God are an ideal example of these tendencies. They constitute at once both the largest evangelical organization in Venezuela and the one from which the most splinters have occurred. Assemblies of God now may be found throughout Venezuela, but their regional stronghold has always been the western portion of the country. Such a regional tendency is common for many evangelical groups, which often tend to be strongest in the areas where they were first established, often years after they have spread throughout the country.²⁵ Developing a strong base of support is important for gathering the strength they need for dynamic growth and expansion. This supports the observation that locally based churches that have invested their organizational resources, however limited, in projects of expansion have been notably more successful than more centralized and more heavily funded organizations based on outside support and personnel.

The traditional evangelical organization that most resembles the Pentecostals in dynamism is the Baptists. Although most Venezuelan Baptist churches generally trace their origins to the U.S.-based Southern Baptist Convention, Venezuelan Baptists have had a fully autonomous national convention since 1959. By the late 1960s and early 1970s they had the leadership, organizational infrastructure, and resource networks to begin a surge of growth that has shown no signs of slowing.²⁶ They are more common than Pentecostals in middle-income areas but much less common in less affluent ones.²⁷

Table 11.1 illustrates the changing composition of the evangelical presence in Venezuela and the Caracas metropolitan area between 1970 and 1990. Most churches have been growing, but the leading Pentecostal organization (Assemblies of God) has been growing much more quickly than the leading nonPentecostal evangelical organization (Baptists). Other Pentecostal organizations,

TABLE 11.1 Growth in the Number of Congregations of Selected Religious Groups for Venezuela as a Whole and the Caracas Metropolitan Region in Particular, 1970-1990

	1970		1990	
	National	Caracas	National	Caracas
Assemblies of God	110	32	590	128
Church of God	16	6	28	12
Baptists	66	13	130	63
Free Church	111	17	233	38
OVICE	93	0	166	7
ADIEL	18	17	67	31
Plymouth Brethren	94	36	76	35
Catholic parishes	743	281	1.045	207

This table is based on the records of the Biblical Society and of individual denominations and the field notes of the Caracas-based Evangelical Directory Project (1990-1991). The sources were up-to-date listings of congregations' names and addresses obtained from the denominations by the Biblical Society. Some listings may have been of the same denominations but acquired by different means. Problems of multiple sources were dealt with individually by cross-checking and interviews with experts. Verification of the figures is, however, impossible for any denomination, as much because of faulty records and difficult communications as because of the tremendous growth these groups have been experiencing. Great caution should be exercised in drawing any conclusions from such data.

such as the Church of God, increased at slower rates. However, such statistics are particularly difficult to use for Pentecostals, since churches founded by a Pentecostal denomination often leave that organization or the organization itself experiences subdivision. For purposes of comparison, the two different organizations of free churches are grouped together, since the major difference between them is really that they were originally based in different parts of the country. The number of congregations affiliated with these important non-Pentecostal organizations has doubled over the past twenty years.²⁸ These churches constitute another growth area, but individual organizations of the free churches are much smaller than the extensive, well-organized National Baptist Convention. Finally, many non-Pentecostal churches such as the Plymouth Brethren are actually declining as membership ages and the younger generation finds other organizations more appealing.

In addition to the dramatic increases in the number of independent congregations evident in these changes, many local churches may contain up to a dozen or more *campos blancos*, dependent congregations founded in selected areas that may later become the basis for new churches. Targeted areas are carefully selected for a relative absence of churches and church activity. Typically, members of the mother church live in or near the area or have connections with sympathetic family, friends, or acquaintances who live in the targeted area. These dependent congregations are carefully nurtured by selected leaders from the sponsoring

church, who often settle in the area and spend most of their free time there. Successful leaders of *campos blancos* may later become pastors of the "daughter" congregations should they become independent and self-supporting. This structure is quite flexible; some groups exist for years and come together chiefly for prayer meetings during the week, and others quickly come to worship independently on weekends as well. It all depends on what works in the local situation. Not surprisingly, the groups with the most *campos blancos* are those that have expanded the fastest, such as the Assemblies of God. These groups are also most likely to expand considerably in coming years, since they can draw on these networks of related congregations that they have created for further development of independent local churches.

Pastoral preparation is based on apprenticeship more than on academic studies. In itself, this is an important source of much of the dynamism of evangelical expansion. Such leaders never leave behind the class identity and social networks they had when they were ordinary members. They enjoy an easy fit with the local community and have an expert salesman's sense of what works and what does not in the business of evangelization and church planning. Once aspiring church leaders are put to work within the local church, they must continually prove themselves as church builders in order to progress to positions of greater responsibility. Only after they have amply manifested their vocation in this way do candidates for full-time ministry go on to seminary-type training. In such a career, a pastor or prospective pastor may be asked to perform tasks or live under conditions that would be difficult for those of other class backgrounds – or national origins – to cope with.²⁹ Consciously comparing himself to Catholic church personnel who worked within the popular sector, one pastor put it this way: "We don't opt for the poor; we are the poor."³⁰

Persons within the evangelical churches who aspire to be leaders or who feel called to do so find that they have clear opportunities within the structures of evangelical churches. Few doors are really closed to aspiring leaders provided that they can read and write and have a strong commitment. Additionally, a number of evangelical churches, particularly Pentecostal ones, have long had a tradition of being as open to women as to men on the grounds that anyone the Spirit calls is worthy.

In Caracas, as many as 7 percent of Protestant pastors are women. In some Pentecostal churches, women make up the majority of local leadership. Within one small Pentecostal denomination, three of its four Caracas churches are headed by women. Even in churches where women are technically barred from leadership roles if qualified men may be found (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses), there are considerable numbers of female leaders.

When authority is defined as charismatic in origin, power becomes more personal than structural. Successful pastors are religious entrepreneurs first, not bureaucrats or organizational team players. Baptists and other traditional evangelicals, particularly the Plymouth Brethren, have had a much lower rate of fission over the years. In these churches, church structures and alliances are different, au-

thority is less charismatic, and the local church organization would be less viable outside of larger church networks.

In general, decisionmaking processes are not particularly egalitarian. Control issues can be especially important in evangelical churches, where authority is more charismatic and less hierarchical than in Catholicism.³¹ Authority does not flow from the legal structure of the denomination but must be established by the pastor, and it often has no recognized limits. The pastor may exercise an enormous degree of patriarchal control in one church but not in another church of the same denomination. In some churches the governing board has the final say. Usually there is a powerful organizational structure and centralized leadership, whether power flows from a single pastor or from a group of elders.

In any case, decisionmaking power does not go beyond the pastor and the congregation. An authority outside the local church may be well respected, but decisionmaking beyond the local level must involve the local church and is made by consensus. In a sense, such practices are reminiscent of the traditional relationship between local caudillos, their followers, and extralocal networks.³²

Many churches, particularly the larger ones, include a range of socioeconomic levels but tend to be made up of persons, as one pastor put it, between the "comfortable middle class and the desperately poor" Occupation is often related to status in the church organization. The committed core of members and leaders of evangelical congregations is typically made up of those who have stable jobs and good incomes relative to the membership of each local church.³³ As key people in the local church organization, these persons are often coordinators of the Sundayschool program, the choir, and the men's, women's, and youth groups. Such groups as these are common subgroups of the local congregation and are almost universally found in churches that have a sufficient membership base. Other positions include deacons and lay preachers, evangelists, ushers, and musicians. Often, local organization seems designed to give every member some kind of leadership responsibility.

Interwoven networks of local leadership affect the way in which members relate to the pastor. In poorer areas, where there are often not many members with the time, educational preparation, or interest to serve as leaders and coordinators, the pastor commonly exercises considerable control and is regarded as the key authority who must be consulted for everything. Such attitudes may spill over into private life as well, and the pastor may be regarded as a kind of father figure to whom all of life's crises and major decisions are brought.³⁴ This, however, is not an automatic feature of evangelical life and stems rather from concrete social circumstances.

Effects of Economic Crisis

Over the past decade, Latin America has experienced one of the most severe economic crises in its history. More people than ever go without the basic necessities. Earlier, less urbanized generations could perhaps find at least a certain

amount of food and shelter, if not economic opportunity, on the land. Now, with its population largely urban, modest economic opportunity that could significantly benefit the popular classes seems unlikely, while food and shelter have become more uncertain than ever.³⁵

In this context, the security offered by social support networks increases in importance. Outside of family groups, however, there are few viable grass-roots networks. Neighborliness is weak, and neighborhood associations in popular areas are generally even weaker.³⁶ Other kinds of linkages exist, including the party system, the state, and ostensibly independent movements such as unions, cooperatives, or local associations, but these remain largely vertically linked structures of limited access controlled from the top by the political parties and the state.³⁷ Although Catholic parishes often have well-structured organizations, pastors estimate that such organizations reach only about 250 persons per parish in Caracas.³⁸ In any case, Catholic parish organizations and activities do not necessarily stimulate strong solidary ties. Further, simply going to mass is unlikely to make one feel linked to a rich communal network. In contrast, evangelical church organizations and worship experiences are especially designed to create a strong, palpable sense of community.³⁹

The solidary ties characteristic of the close-knit church group, reinforced by the pressing needs of the members for such a network, easily combine to produce a highly communitarian organization. This character explains much of the remarkable development of evangelicals during periods of extreme economic and social crisis and accounts for much of their appeal.

Contemporary Catholic-Protestant Relations

Within the past thirty years, relations between Catholicism and the denominations that once operated most of the missionary churches and institutions in Latin America have improved dramatically. However, relations with those that constitute the evangelical community are perhaps more strained than ever before. A formerly distant threat has now become a present danger, and the Catholic hierarchy no longer attempts to hide its discomfort as its traditional dominance of organized religious life in Latin America erodes.⁴⁰

After the Second Vatican Council an immediate, dramatic change in official Catholic references to other Christian groups occurred on a worldwide scale. No longer "heretics," Protestants became "separated brothers." For the first time many Protestant denominations were described as "churches" rather than "sects." Collaboration increased at the level of Bible translations and other joint publications. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether many in the Latin American hierarchy had truly broadened their views on non-Catholics in their local context or had simply been muzzled by a Vatican policy to promote better worldwide intraChristian relations.⁴¹ The bishops' fears were confirmed as evangelical leaders

linked the soaring growth of their churches in the 1970s to the increased tolerance and openness on the part of Catholics.⁴²

Venezuelan Catholic clerics, not unlike their counterparts throughout Latin America, tend toward facile explanations of the dramatically increasing evangelical presence.⁴³ Not uncommonly, the U.S. government forces are seen as responsible. Evangelicals are accused of unfairly competing with the weakly financed Catholic church and said to be essentially buying converts. In so doing, the argument goes, foreign agents are thereby draining Latin America of a key unifying force, its religious heritage, and opening the door to more complete cultural domination by the United States. This interpretation is common throughout Latin America and may be heard both in left-wing political circles and conservative Catholic ones.⁴⁴ The explanations that evangelicals offer for their growth are no more useful. Instead of fear they reflect a kind of triumphal millennialism. Leaders and members alike commonly give no other explanation than that the hour the Lord has appointed has arrived at last.⁴⁵

Although Venezuelan evangelical churches originally developed out of British and North American missionary efforts, they can no longer be described as "foreign" They are neither foreign-staffed nor foreign-controlled. When the foreign bases of Catholic and evangelical groups are compared, the explanation for evangelicals' success commonly cited by many leaders of the Venezuelan Catholic church loses merit.⁴⁶ In reality, foreign involvement is probably more significant for the continuing vitality of Venezuelan Catholicism, as it is for much of Latin American Catholicism in general.

Foreign-born evangelical pastors from outside of Latin America are typically from the United States and tend to be responsible for small middle-class churches or to provide support for locally based churches. Their numbers have not been large, although the pastor of one of the largest and most important evangelical churches in Caracas, Las Acacias, has been led by a person of U.S. origin and education, Samuel Olson, since its founding. Nevertheless, over the past decade the number of North American Catholic priests and lay missionaries in Caracas has not been very different from that of their North American Protestant equivalents. Each group numbers about a dozen at any one time, most of them engaged in support work and not principal leaders of a church, chapel, or congregation.⁴⁷ Significantly, one of the largest and most rapidly expanding Pentecostal denominations, the Assemblies of God, has no non-Spanish surnames listed in its national directory of personnel. Although headquartered in the United States, the denomination has learned the lesson of local leadership well and is perhaps the strongest, most rapidly growing church of any in Venezuela (or, indeed, in Latin America in general). The Venezuelan evangelical movement (both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal) has in fact experienced its greatest growth since foreign parent churches began reducing their financial and personnel support relative to local contributions in the late 1960s.

The available data for Catholicism present a different picture. A 1984 study found that an astonishing 984 of 1,077 Catholic religious-order priests, or 94 percent of the total, were not born in Venezuela. Most originated in Spain, and almost all came from Europe or North America.⁴⁸ In Caracas, some 68 percent of all parish pastors – 53 percent of the diocesan pastors and 90 percent of the religious pastors – are foreign-born. Forty-one percent are from Spain, and thirteen nationalities are represented in all.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, local church leaders with such international contacts know how to seek foreign financial support. In part, the cosmopolitan nature of Catholic personnel may explain why so many local church projects have been funded by granting agencies based in Europe or North America. Contacts are frequently made through one's own religious order or congregation or on the basis of independent projects initiated and carried out by a single priest or nun with specific financial or institutional connections. Although the haphazard and uncoordinated nature of such funding makes exact figures impossible to obtain, it seems likely that foreign-originated support for Catholic projects easily exceeds foreign support of evangelical work.⁵⁰

The emergence and dramatically increasing appeal of the evangelicals, both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal, cannot really be explained by reference to powerful forces outside the region. Consideration must be given to cultural changes and continuities as Latin American societies have accomplished the transition from an agricultural economy based on large landed estates and subsistence farming to an urban service economy. In the new urban environment, traditional Catholic pastoral approaches no longer work, and newer ones have proved incapable of preventing the increasing consolidation of the religious alternative represented by the evangelicals.

Venezuelan Catholic leaders typically have not recognized the full implications of the profound changes that have taken place in social and religious life. For example, many commonly claim that when priests come into an area of evangelical converts people abandon their new-found evangelical faiths and seek out the priest as a representative of a religion that they had never really rejected.⁵¹ In a similar vein, parish pastors often deride the new religion of their former parishioners, suggesting that evangelicals are no less likely than their nonevangelical neighbors to be at a site of supposed Marian apparitions or to participate in cultural events such as the traditional festivals of local patron saints.⁵² Ultimately, institutional Catholicism still wistfully assumes that the problem is merely one of priestly vocations rather than a basic and permanent loss of credibility and clientele.

Cultural Changes and Continuities

Popular Catholicism has facilitated the transition to Pentecostalism among the lower classes. Although part of a worldwide religious phenomenon, Pentecostalism has thoroughly adapted its meanings, structures, and worship to

its local environment. This ready adaptation results from the natural flexibility of congregational religion, but it is also a result of a belief in the legitimacy of flexibly following the Spirit. If a certain style wins more converts, this constitutes a sign in itself. If a charismatic church leader has considerable success in church founding, that style is legitimated. Venezuelan Pentecostalism enjoys distinct advantages over its competitors. It has a more flexible structure than traditional evangelicals and a belief system akin to that found in popular religion. Pentecostal churches are typically characterized by independent local church structures far stronger than the larger church organizations of which they are a part. For this reason, Pentecostal church organizations fission frequently, and unity is often maintained on the basis of charismatic leadership rather than long-term institutional commitments.

Discursive Shifts

The evangelical religious message has transformed religious culture in many important ways, often influencing formal Catholic practice in its wake. One of the most lasting effects of Catholic baptism and other sacraments in Latin America has been the *compadrazgo* relationship.⁵³ Those who commit themselves as sponsors, or godparents (*compadres*), to the baptized enter into a lifelong relationship with that person. They are expected to provide gifts, emotional support, social contacts, and even a roadside marker in the case of accidental death on a road or highway.⁵⁴ Traditionally, the ideal *compadre* was the owner or overseer of a large estate who would take on a religiously sanctioned commitment to be charitable to the offspring of a peasant or peon on his estate in return for being regarded as a father figure. Religion in this way legitimated and formalized economic and social relations and became a kind of glue that held the class system together.

In evangelical churches as well, baptism results in a lasting nonkinship-based extended-family tie. The baptized are *hermanos* (brothers and sisters) to other members of the congregation and to other evangelicals as well. This identity is not limited to a particular congregation or denomination. In fact, evangelicals, Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal, usually refer to members of any evangelical church as *hermanos*.⁵⁵ Mere organizational differences are a minor point when all belong to the same movement and recognize its solidarity.

This relation is considerably more horizontal than the fictive kin relationship characteristic of traditional Catholicism. Its more communal aspect also suggests an opening to congregational religious life. Contemporary Catholicism is by no means without forms of communal religious experience, however. In part influenced by their Protestant counterparts, members of some Catholic groups, such as the catechumens, charismatics, and many youth groups, also refer to fellow members as *hermanos*. However, in the Catholic context this term is not universal and ultimately contradictory.⁵⁶ Instead of referring to all the baptized members of even just one denomination, it is meant to include only those committed

to one's specific subgroup or the values it represents. For those who use the term, both evangelical and Catholic, this change in vocabulary is reflective of a momentous change in thinking and organization with far-reaching implications.

Another change observable in Catholicism but characteristic of Pentecostals (and true of evangelicals generally) is the word used for "pray." The traditional word used in folk Catholicism, *rezar*, is supplanted by the exclusive use of *orar*. *Rezar* implies the mere rote recitation of formula prayers. *Orar* represents the fast-flowing, often emotionally expressive release of words and thoughts as praise or pleas. Contemporary Catholic groups often employ this term as well, but among evangelicals few words are quite as taboo as *rezar*, which is sometimes seen as neatly summing up all that evangelical religion opposes in Catholicism.

Political and Social Implications

A key feature of evangelical Christianity is its characteristically Reformed ethic of self-denial and right living, which in proper economic settings can encourage saving and a measurable degree of social mobility over time. However, in the contemporary Latin American context such mobility does not necessarily occur, and it is by no means a defining characteristic of contemporary evangelical Christianity.⁵⁷ For the most part, the contemporary economic situation of Latin America allows for very little room to "redeem [spiritually] and uplift [economically]" the new converts.⁵⁸ Instead, a common message is that the "last will be first."⁵⁹ There is little connection between Latin America evangelical Protestantism and upward mobility. This is even more true of Pentecostals than of non-Pentecostal evangelicals, since the former tend to be slightly poorer and to have less interest in the kinds of capital accumulation strategies for which Calvinists are allegedly famous. Politically, evangelicals (again, Pentecostals even more than non-Pentecostals) are neither inevitably conservative nor apathetic. Rather, these options need to be placed in their broader historical context. A religiously sanctioned withdrawal from politics usually occurs during the formation period, when believers perceive their political options as relatively few. Often, withdrawal follows from the strong millennial orientation that characterizes the beginnings of an evangelical movement. Once the movement is under way and has a veteran membership, life becomes more routinized and ordinary civic and political participation becomes more plausible." The issue then becomes what form of political participation is most "evangelical" and "biblical" according to the situation. To describe the politics believers choose as simply "conservative" misses the point.

Contrary to widespread belief among liberationist Catholics and secular commentators, evangelicals (both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals) are not apolitical. This perspective is too simple to explain their participation in politics in the United States and hardly serves in the Latin American context. Their agenda, strategies, and orientation may be different from those of liberationist Catholics,

but their message cannot usefully be defined as "conservative" in a North American sense. So-called conservative social issues that have politically galvanized evangelicals in the United States, such as abortion and school prayer, are nonissues for Latin American evangelicals. Abortion is illegal, and secular schools are emphatically preferred without public prayer, catechism, or anything that would give the nominally numerically stronger Catholic church an advantage.⁶¹

The classical Latin American conservatives, in any case, are more often staunch Roman Catholic corporatists or integralists. Further, neoliberal economic and social policy, whether defined as "liberal" or "conservative," is also outside the interests of evangelicals. Along with most of the population, they have been on the losing end of these policies. Prominent evangelicals (including many of the most prominent Pentecostals) who do support such policies tend to be engineers and others who find such policies in keeping with their worldview and economic interest.

Evangelical politics is ultimately based on the same underlying principle as Catholic liberationist political engagement. Both evangelicals and liberationists want their values to be reflected in everyday political life, and both tend to espouse positions embraced by many outside their particular groups. If "politics" as currently practiced is widely regarded as corrupt, some conclude that for the moment it is too corrupting for them to take part other than as "prophetic witnesses," while others may find that people such as themselves are precisely those who therefore must take part. These two contrasting perspectives are similar to those found within the general population.

There seems to be wide agreement among evangelicals of many differing political and theological positions that if they *could* take a leadership role in public life, they ought to. Differences are over whether the time has arrived for activist involvement in politics. When the Union Latinoamericana de Evangelicos en Poder (Latin American Union of Evangelicals in Politics) was set up in Buenos Aires in 1991, a central debate was whether the evangelical community should organize its own political parties or participate in existing ones. The issue is by no means settled. Most of the members of this organization, which represents evangelical politicians from some sixteen Latin American countries, including Venezuela, belong to long-established political parties. However, over the past decade there has been an increasing tendency to establish specifically evangelical parties, and it seems likely that virtually every major Latin American country will soon have one.

Venezuela was the first of Latin American countries to have such a political party. The Organización Renovadora Auténtica (Authentic Renewal Organization—ORA), formed in 1976, acts specifically for evangelical interests when it champions changes in legislation regulating church activity. At times it is also an important minority political player in the building of coalitions of support for various legislative programs. Significantly, ORA believes that modernization will begin only when Venezuelan legal and political structures are truly "reformed."⁶²

Some of the party's rhetoric explicitly rejects Iberian models, holding them responsible for the collective national crisis. The party's explicit prescription for Venezuelan social ills is the complete adoption of U.S. and Northern European legal structures and social values, considered as more successful because they are fundamentally evangelical Protestant in nature. ORAs presidential candidate in the 1988 election, Godofredo Marin, advocated "democracy based on the Bible," a slogan that nicely illustrates the tenor of the politics practiced by the party.

By U.S. standards, ORA's political perspective may well seem more "conservative" than "liberal." However, as we have seen, these labels can be misleading in a Latin American context, since the party in fact advocates radical change. Indeed, there is precious little in Venezuela's cultural or legal heritage that it would like to "conserve." Aside from promoting its particular ideology, the party also serves as a pressure group for the legal needs and political representation of the evangelical movement as a whole. In this movement, as in many others, the boundaries between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals are easily transcended via the much more powerful common identification as evangelicals.

Just as Latin American evangelicals in general are divided over the issue of confessional political parties, Venezuelan evangelicals are internally divided on the same issue. Most evangelicals in Venezuela do not support ORA, which they see as only one of many political options. Among evangelicals I interviewed, for example, as many voted for the Christian Democratic party, which has origins in Catholic social doctrine and the Catholic educated professional classes, as for ORA. By far the political party that receives the greatest support from evangelicals is the ruling Accion Democratica (Democratic Action) party, long identified with populist politics and representative of the political status quo. In general, the political agenda of ORA is seen as too ideological and too different from ordinary Venezuelan politics for most Venezuelan evangelicals to feel comfortable with it. Nevertheless, ORA has provided the evangelical community a model of political action and sparked a deep debate over the place of evangelicals in politics.⁶³

Today, the evangelical community, once simply interested in breaking the Catholic religious monopoly, has an increasingly diverse agenda. Previously, it was common to hear pastors preach that the believer does not involve himself in politics. Now, evangelicals commonly say that "brothers vote for brothers." The future relationship of evangelicals (whether Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal) and politics is as yet uncharted territory.⁶⁴ In a way suggestive of future possibilities, recent elections throughout Latin America have shown that the nonevangelical population is disposed to vote for evangelical candidates, who often have an image of greater trustworthiness simply because they are evangelicals.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Certainly, Pentecostals have had record success in evangelization-surpassing the already impressive record of evangelicals in general. The lessons they offer to Catholic leaders initiating the so-called new evangelization are many. The issues

that their success raises are common to the study of social movements, particularly within the resource-mobilization framework. Techniques that evangelicals, particularly Pentecostals, have pioneered in the contemporary Latin American context demonstrate the shortcomings of Catholic approaches and call into question current Catholic structures and perspectives. It is as yet unclear if Catholicism will develop an effective response to its formidable new competitor. The social and cultural ramifications of numerous new, communal religious movements throughout the popular sector are profound and permanent.

NOTES

1. Jacinto Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela* (Caracas: Ediciones Tripode, 1980), p. 26.

2. Their representatives and political party have been pressing publicly for changes in the legal structure governing religious activities and have successfully rebuffed an attempt to pass legislation that would make it more difficult for evangelical churches to grow. Projections call for evangelical majorities by the end of the next century, and bold plans for evangelical charitable and educational organizations to rival Catholic ones have been proposed for the first time.

3. See Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela*. It must also be recalled that whatever foreign personnel or resources evangelicals had at their disposal could be matched by the no doubt far more considerable foreign-originated resources of the Venezuelan Catholic church. Unfortunately, both Protestants and Catholics are too decentralized to permit the gathering of data of this kind.

4. A major symbol of all that was seen as wrong with religion and society in Latin America was the fact that preconciliar Catholicism in Latin America effectively discouraged and marginalized the reading of the Bible by the laity. That is, the people were at once denied the direct, personal exposure to God's word that salvation requires, and their illiteracy and ignorance on a broader, social level were reinforced. Religious ignorance and other forms of backwardness were seen as related; both religious and social progress would occur with the introduction of Protestantism. The sheer force of such triumphalist notions of progress and manifest destiny were typical of the era and the related missionary activity.

5. For more discussion of this strategy, particularly in the context of Brazil, see Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

6. Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela*, pp. 40-43.

7. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which details dispensationalist theology, was heavily influenced by this group, as were groups such as the Dallas Theological Seminary.

8. As Nils Bloch-Hoell, in *The Pentecostal Movement* (London: Scandinavian University Books, 1964), points out, the Pentecostal movement has roots in Europe as well as North America. However, Pentecostalism arrived in Latin America directly via the Pentecostal movements common to many denominations in the early twentieth century. See Walter J. Hollenweger, "Methodism's Past in Pentecostalism's Present: A Case Study of a Cultural Clash in Chile," *Goworth Review*, May 1979, pp. 33-47, for an account of how Pentecostalism came to Chile, D. Smith, "Coming of Age: A Reflection on Pentecostals,

Politics, and Popular Religion in Guatemala," unpublished report, Centro Evangelico Latinoamericano de Estudios Pastorales, Guatemala City, 1991, for a description of the first Pentecostals in Guatemala, and Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela*.

9. The Chilean case is illustrative here. See Hollenweger, "Methodism's Past," and Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *El refugio de las masas: Estudio sociologico del Protestantismo chileno* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacifico, 1968).

10. Such churches do not establish denominational structures but rather engender networks of "daughter" churches, "sister" churches, and "allied" churches.

11. For descriptions of how Pentecostal or charismatic-"Spirit-filled" forms of religious experience gel with popular notions of the religious, see Franz Damen, "El Pentecostalismo en Bolivia," "El Pentecostalismo: Algunos rasgos," "El Pentecostalismo: Ruptura y continuidad," and "Cuestionario sobre las sectas," *Fe y Pueblo: Boletin Ecumenico de Reflexion Teologica* 3, 14 (1986), pp. 22-23, 31-39, 44-49, 50-56; *El desafio de las sectas* (La Paz, 1988); and "sectas," in *Mysterium liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la teologia de la liberacion* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1990), pp. 423-445; and M. Preiswerk and F. Damen, eds., "Pentecostalismo y religiosidad popular: Dos enfoques," *Fe y Pueblo: Boletin Ecumenico de Reflexion Teologica* 3, 14 (1986), pp. 40-43. This is by no means a new finding in the literature, having been developed by Lalive d'Epinay, *Refugio de las masas*; Cornelia Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976) and "Pentecostalism and Development: The Colombian Case," in Stephen D. Glazier, ed., *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 81-94; and Karl-Wilhelm Westmeier, *Reconciling Heaven and Earth: The Transcendental Enthusiasm and Growth of an Urban Protestant Community* (Bogota and Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986), among others.

12. The Great Commission is the part of the Gospel in which Jesus tells his followers to go and preach to all the nations.

13. The common interpretation of the Great Commission now became that all in some way had to have access to evangelical religion in order for the Second Coming of Christ to occur. See Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

14. Differences between countries in terms of the evangelical experience cannot, of course, be explained by differences in the urban experience per se and must be explained by reference to the historically specific panoply of factors in each particular country.

15. In rural areas, evangelical religion spread similarly, through the effect of the cities. Greater ease of transportation and communication brought former residents of rural towns and villages and others from the city to the country. This process brought both new ideas and organizers to the countryside, and after a brief lag, rural areas quickly became as influenced by the new religious currents as popular neighborhoods in the city. Because the affluent classes are smaller than in the larger metropolitan areas, the changes wrought by the evangelicals are now perhaps even more palpable in the countryside.

16. For examples of how this has occurred in Venezuela and elsewhere, see Angelina Pollak-Eltz, *Maria Lionza: Mito y culto venezolano* (Caracas: Universidad Catolica Andres Belle, 1985) and *La religiosidad popular en Venezuela* (Caracas: San Pablo, 1994).

17. Of the latter two groups of liberationists and modernizers, neither is entirely made up of Catholics. There are some, albeit few, liberationist-minded evangelicals, and many traditional evangelicals are more rationalist in their beliefs than Pentecostals.

18. On gratifying immediate needs, see Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia* and "Pentecostalism and Development," and Judith Hoffnagel, "Pentecostalism: A Revolutionary or Conservative Movement?" in Stephen D. Glazier, ed., *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1980). Damen, *El desaffo de las sectas*, expresses this idea of complementarity *very* forcefully. The elective affinity between popular religious tradition and Pentecostal Christianity is probably stronger than any tie, potential or alleged, with any other organized religious form.

19. See Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*

20. Donna Birdwell-Pheasant, "The Power of Pentecostalism in a Belizean Village," in Stephen D. Glazier, ed., *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), p. 104.

21. See Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, pp. 84-85.

22. In part this evangelical "explosion" may be due to the rapidly increasing literacy rates of the past few decades, which allow for many more readers of biblical texts. However, in my fieldwork it is often hard to demonstrate which comes first; being committed to evangelical religion is often what leads people to become literate in the first place.

23. In most Latin American countries today, about 15 percent of the population is Protestant, and in some countries this percentage now exceeds 30. Those countries where evangelicals are particularly present, Guatemala and Puerto Rico, are by no means the countries where they are the most numerous. The regional giant Brazil leads in numbers of evangelicals, baptized Catholics, and practitioners of spiritist religions. For more details on percentages and members, see Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* His appendix is particularly helpful.

24. See Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement*; see also Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971 [1942]), esp. chap. 7.

25. This tendency may be due to the fact that the first missionary efforts typically occurred in areas with no evangelical competition. Thus these groups were able to establish near-monopolies of evangelical activity in many of the areas in which they worked, perpetuating their regional strengths.

26. For a detailed description of Baptist development and strategy, see Ayerra, *Los Protestantas en Venezuela*, pp. 53-57, esp. pp. 54.

27. According to an ecological analysis of all the churches of Caracas, when neighborhoods are ranked from 1 (affluent) to 10 (poverty-stricken), Baptist churches average 5 and Pentecostal churches 7.

28. These offshoots of free-church-related missionary activity are the Organizacion Venezolana de Iglesias Cristianas Evangelicas (OVICE), which developed from evangelical efforts in the eastern part of Venezuela that may be traced back as far as 1927, and the Asociacion de Iglesias Evangelicas Libres (ADIEL), which emerged in the central portion of the country and had its beginnings in 1903. Both denominations trace their history to historically Scandinavian churches based in the North American upper Midwest. As such they are heirs to the Pietist movement against state Lutheranism and are conservative, fundamentalist, and congregational in orientation.

29. Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*, p. 219 also cites sources on this issue, and I have seen it corroborated in my own fieldwork.

30. See Rolando Gutierrez, "Nuestra evangelizacion," *Latin American Evangelist*, October-December 1990, p. 7. The author is a Baptist pastor in Mexico City and was president of the Mexican National Baptist Convention in 1990.

31. Max Weber's discussion of different kinds of authority remains a classic and is helpful in understanding the differences between the churches (*The Sociology of Religion*, 6th ed. [Boston: Beacon Press, 1992]). Differences between individual churches of the same denomination maybe as great as differences between denominations.

32. In the case of caudillos, extralocal networks typically included the state, a political party, and the military.

33. This varies, of course, with the membership. In small congregations in the barrios, bank tellers may be among the leading members; in large, citywide congregations such as that of the nondenominational Iglesia Evangelica Pentecostal Las Acacias, bank tellers and secretaries may be among the ordinary members and those of higher socioeconomic levels may include engineers and other professionals. I base this description on my interviews and a census of the approximately 1,500-member Las Acacias church.

34. Hoffnagel, "Pentecostalism," and Lalive d'Epinay, *Refugio de las masas*, describe this situation well, and Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, details such practices in terms of the "shepherding" movement and other developing charismatic forms of Christian discipline.

35. On migrants to Caracas, see Kenneth Kartz, Murray Schwartz, and Audrey Schwartz, *The Evolution of Law in the Barrios of Caracas* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, Latin American Center, 1973); Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983). My own interviews, based to some degree on this study, produced similar findings. For immigrants, until the past decade the city really has offered a better future. Life in the countryside remains as undesirable as ever.

36. See Larissa Lomnitz, *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (New York: Academic Press, 1977). My own research corroborates this point, as does Kartz, Schwartz, and Schwartz, *The Evolution of Law*.

37. In most vertical structures, resources have to be offered in exchange for access, and when one is required to bid for access those with the fewest resources lose.

38. This is based on data for Caracas provided by a 1989 survey.

39. Again and again commentators have referred to this feature of Latin American evangelical religion. See, for example, John Landry, "Epic Changes Here to Stay," *Latin American Evangelist*, April-June 1991, p. 4. Even the Venezuelan bishops recognize this, as do Venezuelan Catholic writers in general. Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, *Instruction pastoral del Episcopado venezolano sobre el fenomeno de las sectas* (Caracas, 1988); Juan Miguel Ganuza, *La renovation catolica carismatica: Documentos de la iglesia* (Caracas: Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, 1978); Juan Manarriz, "El desafio de las sectas: Una avalancha de sectas nos esta invadiendo," *Familia Cristiana* 7, 4(1988), pp. 17-19.

40. The bibliography is too long to cite here. Samuel E. Escobar, *La fe evangelica y las teologias de la liberation* (El Paso: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1987), is among useful references on this issue.

41. Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* seems to support this view.

42. See Charles Berg, "Memories and a Reminder," *Latin American Evangelist*, April-June 1987, p. 5.

43. Interviews with Fr. Nicholas Espinoza, rector of Holy Trinity Chapel, Caracas, November 15, 1990; Fr. Francisco Javier Alberdi, pastor of Jesus of Nazareth parish, La Caruciena, Barquisimeto, January 5, 1990; Fr. Ignacio Bercibar, pastor of Dolores, Puerto Nutrias, and Ciudad Nutrias, Dolores, Barinas, December 30, 1990; Msgr. Manuel Delgado Avila, secretary of the Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, Caracas, January 20, 1990; Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, *Mision permanente: Plan de pastoral de conjunto, 1986-1992* (Caracas, 1986).

44. Nonreligious left-wing activists have often led the fight to oppose such groups as the Nueva Tribus, a local branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics described in Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela*. Although this literature is largely produced by leftist intellectuals, it is often crudely extended to all evangelical groups by both conservative and progressive church leaders. See, for example, Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, *Instruction pastoral*; Bercibar, interview; Delgado, interview.

45. See, for example, Arturo Diaz, "Análisis, diagnóstico y perspectivas de la obra evangelica en Caracas, Venezuela," unpublished report, Consejo Evangelico de Venezuela, Caracas; Arthur Johnson, *Llanos inundados (Flooded Plains): A History and Analysis of the Iglesias Nativas Apurenas of Venezuela*, Master's thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., 1978; Arturo Rios, *Presencia evangelica venezolana en la politico: (Maracaibo: Organization Venezolano de Iglesias Cristianas Evangelicas, 1977) and De los pequenos principios a las grandes realizaciones (Maracaibo: Editorial Libertador, 1976)*.

46. See Secretariado Permanente del Episcopado Venezolano, *Instruction pastoral*, p. 16. Typical of the clergy's interpretation of the growth of evangelical Christianity in Venezuela are the comments of Espinoza, interview.

47. In fact, I know of only three evangelical pastors and three Catholic priests of North American origin who head local churches in Caracas. Many more North American Protestants than Catholics make brief visits of support for the local churches, but more European Catholics than Protestants can be found working in and with the local churches.

48. *Los religiosos en Venezuela: Levantamiento sociografico* (Caracas: Secretariado Conjunto de Religiosos y Religiosas de Venezuela, 1984), p. 23.

49. In 1950, when clergy immigration began to increase, only some 12.5 percent of the population of the Federal District (which includes Caracas) was foreign-born and only 4 percent of the total national population had originated outside of the country. (I. Alonso et al., *La iglesia en Venezuela y Ecuador* [Bogota: Oficina Central de Investigaciones de FERES, 1962], p. 141.) In 1981, well after the end of the period of migration of clergy, some 6 percent of those living in Venezuela were foreign-born (Diagnostico Social Permanente, *Informe social 1981* [Caracas: Oficina Central de Estadística e Información, 1982]; Centro de Investigación en las Ciencias Sociales, Caracas, unpublished data on 639 ecologically homogeneous areas of metropolitan Caracas categorized and ranked between 1985 and 1990.) Thus, although the clergy has tended to originate in the same countries as the major immigrant groups, Catholic clerics have clearly immigrated disproportionately to other persons.

50. It is hardly an exaggeration to point out that most Catholic projects enjoy some form of foreign or state support, however modest, be it in the form of a jeep, a salary, or a building. This is not to argue that foreign support is "high" and is meant only to em-

phasize that it indeed exists for both groups. Evangelicals, of course, tend to use whatever funds they may receive toward further preaching and church founding, whereas Catholic groups typically apply their funds toward social ends. Catholics have little investment and few skills in the area of public relations or mass marketing, activities with which the North American-influenced evangelicals are very familiar. At the same time, evangelicals can point to nothing that rivals the Catholic network of schools, training institutes, and small grass-roots agencies found throughout Latin America. Both sides, in effect, feel threatened precisely because the strength of the other is in the area of their greatest weakness.

51. Delgado, interview.

52. Berecibar, interview; Alberdi, interview.

53. See Westmeier, *Reconciling Heaven and Earth*, pp. 113 and 228.

54. This latter obligation was brought to my attention by Alejandro Ortiz, a cultural anthropologist who has researched the origins of roadside death markers in Venezuela. I mention it to illustrate the responsibilities and obligations that *compadrazgo* traditionally implied.

55. This notion and a helpful bibliographic review are found in Westmeier, *Reconciling Heaven and Earth*, p. 217.

56. This stems, of course, from the church-sect distinction long ago explored by Weber and his disciple Troeltsch.

57. Flora, "Pentecostalism and Development," p. 90; see also Guillermo Cook, "The Evangelical Groundswell in Latin America," *Christian Century* 107 (December 12, 1990), pp. 1172-1178.

58. Cook, "The Evangelical Groundswell."

59. Flora, "Pentecostalism and Development," p. 85. This commonly reflects the thinking of evangelical religion among the poor in Latin America, and I frequently encountered it in my interviews. It is a kind of reversed notion of the Calvinist ethic, one that Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) shows to be common in millennial religion. Those most successful were mostly going to be damned for being unbelievers while the (unsuccessful) believers would have eternal life. For a sense of the tradition behind this belief in evangelical Christianity, see Cook, "The Evangelical Groundswell," p. 24.

60. See Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* on common contrasts between first and second-generation converts.

61. Unless, of course, government-supported religious training in schools could be evangelical, as some evangelical politicians argue that it should be. These, however, are minority voices. Most seem to prefer to leave well enough alone and do not have much interest in seeking out government subsidies for such activities.

62. So many of the founders of this party, as well as the leaders of major evangelical umbrella organizations, were trained as engineers or math teachers that one wonders if there is some relation between this profession and the potential likelihood of professing an evangelical faith.

63. Ayerra, *Los Protestantes en Venezuela*, and discussions with many members and observers of the evangelical movement in Venezuela.

64. See Jochen Streiter, "Resenas," *Presencia Ecumenica*, December 1991, p. 57, citing the work of Rene Padilla.

65. See "Fe cristiana y politica en el Peru," *Edificacion Cristiana* 145-146 (1991), p. 3 which is based on many items in the media that appeared at the time of the election of Serrano in Guatemala and Alberto Fujimori in Peru. On the issue of the image of greater trustworthiness for being evangelical, many writers have shown this to be a widely generalized popular perception. See, for example, Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*; Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*; Hoffnagel, "Pentecostalism"; and Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* 1990, among others.